

## Leadership and Communication training

Perceived effects in a multinational subsidiary in Brazil

Hamrin, Solange



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# Abstract

**Purpose:** This study explores the perceived effects of a leadership communication programme in a Brazilian subsidiary of a Swedish corporation.

**Design/methodology/approach:** The findings are drawn from the analysis of interviews with 12 leaders – eight males and four females – in different hierarchical positions. Further, three of these leaders were observed and interviewed twice in a year. The study also collected interviews with nine co-workers. The data were structured using inductive reasoning. The first set of interviews were conducted a year after the respondents/leaders participated in an internal communication and leadership training programme.

**Findings:** Findings illustrate the leadership and communication training programme had a positive effect on enhancing leaders' awareness and their ability to use tools to be more effective communicatively, using linguistic resources to achieve better organizational performance in their teams. The leaders acquired a similar communication language and continue to focus on planning communication even two years after the training.

**Research limitations/implications:** It is important to continue researching leadership communication development with studies analysing programmes in different contexts, as well as employing mixed research methods in studies with large samples.

**Practical implication:** The present study offers insights about which needs the participants perceived that they had, in order to learn how to communicate more effectively, and the results from communication training for leaders.

**Originality/value:** This explorative study has a theoretical and empirical contribution to research in leadership and communication development, an area in which the literature about training and intervention is rare. The findings in this paper illustrate that communication training has a positive impact on leaders' performance, with benefits their teams and organizations.

**Keywords:** leadership; communication; effective communication, leadership development programmes; leadership training effects.





## Executive summary

This study explores leaders' and co-workers' perceptions of the effects of a leadership communication-training programme in a Brazilian subsidiary of a Swedish corporation. The data for the study were collected in two phases; the first one consisted of a total of 12 interviews with leaders who participated in the Communication for Results (CFR) training in 2017. The first interviews took place in August 2018, one year after the training; three of the interviewed leaders were also observed. For the second phase, the same three leaders were interviewed again in November 2019. To the material was added interviews with these leaders' co-workers, a total of nine interviews. The study aimed to investigate what effects leadership and communication training had on participants and also understand how the effects impacted on these leaders' communication behaviors. To fulfill this aim, the study was guided by the following research questions:

### Research Questions

- RQ1: How do leaders perceive the leadership and communication program?
- RQ2: What effects do leaders perceive that the leadership and communication training had on their communication behavior?
- RQ3: What effects of the training are lasting on leaders' communication behavior?
- RQ4: What effects of the training do co-workers perceive on leaders' communication behavior?

The findings illustrate that leaders perceived that the training contributed to increasing their awareness about communication and the effects had a positive impact on their communication behaviors, both individually and within their teams. The respondents felt safer communicating strategically; they incorporated several parts of the training in their communication routines and acquired a shared language referring to communication. The findings in the second phase of the study illustrated that the training had a longitudinal effect on these leaders' communication behaviors, through instigating them towards a more holistic communication development, and leading them to request and participate in other internal and external trainings. Co-workers perceived these leaders as role models and outstanding communicators. However, they could not confirm the improvements in leaders' communication, but could not indicate when their behavior changed.

### Conclusion

The communication and leadership training Communication for Results (CFR) had a positive effect on leaders' communication. First, leaders created a shared communication language that still is salient in their conversations about communicating with individuals and with their workgroups. Second, the training impacted leaders' communication behavior and these effects were still lasting two years after the training. The literature on leadership and communication training is not sufficiently vast, but the effects of training in this study showed that leadership training focusing on communication change leaders' communication behaviors with benefits to their teams and organisations. This study also showed that leaders need feasible examples of how they can improve their communication. Moreover, leadership and communication trainings have to be contextualized to leaders' local reality to be effective.

# Leadership training and communication

Leadership development literature has focused on leaders' traits, skills, and behaviors that can make individuals in leadership positions more effective, in order to provide more successful outcomes to the organizations<sup>1</sup>. Certain theories frequently mentioned the environment of leadership training programs because they are expected to increase leadership effectiveness, such as transformational leadership and contingency theories, as well as situational leadership and path-goal theory, which are commonly mentioned in leadership training programmes<sup>2</sup>.

The literature on leadership training has not sufficiently explored leaders' communication, and those studies available rarely mention the effects of communication training on leaders, employees, and organizational performance. Very little research has emphasized leaders' needs for becoming more aware and competent in their communication<sup>3</sup>. Communicative skills, such as listening, framing, and storytelling<sup>4</sup> (with an emphasis on linguistic resources as metaphors) must be developed for enhancing effectiveness in individuals' leadership practices. Despite the focus not being on communication as a necessity to enact leadership<sup>5</sup>, the few studies on leadership development and training mentioning some aspects of communication have stressed that characteristics such as dialogical coaching behaviors<sup>6</sup> are grounded in interactional processes. These studies mentioned that communication serves to elevate a set of skills common for relational leaders, such as feedback, listening (active listening), and coaching (developing others and sharing power with co-workers)<sup>7</sup>. Although the findings of these studies neither focus on nor provide enough evidence that leadership communication training programmes affect performance, organizations are still developing their leadership communication training programmes, aiming to increase the performance of leaders, groups, and organizations.

Against this background, this study proposes to highlight the perceived effects of the implementation of a leadership and communication programme in a Brazilian subsidiary of a multinational corporation with headquarters located in Sweden. Drawing from the accounts of 12 leaders who participated in a leadership and communication training (Communication for results) in different hierarchical positions and 9 employees, the study also sheds light on leaders' perceived changed communication behaviors related to individual and group performance. To do that, the following research questions will guide this study:

RQ1: How do leaders perceive the leadership and communication program?

RQ2: What effects do leaders perceive that the leadership and communication training had on their communication behavior?

RQ3: What effects of the training are lasting on leaders' communication behavior?

RQ4: What effects of the training do co-workers perceive on leaders' communication behavior?

<sup>1</sup> (see Northouse, 2016; Day, 2000 for overviews)

<sup>2</sup> (Northouse, 2016)

<sup>3</sup> (Grill, Ahlborg Jr & Wiström, 2013; Fairhurst, 2005)

<sup>4</sup> (Kuram, 2013)

<sup>5</sup> (Alvesson, 2011, Fairhurst, 2007; Fairhurst & Uhl-Bien 2012)

<sup>6</sup> (see Rapp-Ricciardi, Garcia & Archer, 2018; Bharwani, Kline & Patterson, 2017; Korth, 2016)

<sup>7</sup> (Hedman, 2016; Rapp-Ricciardi, Garcia & Archer, 2018)

## Leadership development and communication

The literature of leadership training emphasizes that training has to be contextualized within the participants' organization<sup>8</sup> and aligned with organizational and business goals<sup>9</sup> to be successful. Campbell and colleagues<sup>10</sup> studied support contingency approaches of leadership, and these approaches suggest that effective leadership is dependent upon the interaction between leaders' behaviors and the situation<sup>11</sup>. The study aimed to assist human resources (HR) practitioners to configure their decisions about leadership training development, which, according to them, are dependent on what outcomes the organizations intend to achieve with the training. Leadership training, therefore, has to be in harmony with organizational culture and aligned with top management's visions, because participants – mostly senior staff or potential leaders<sup>12</sup> – hold positions that give them the power to change the organizational context and culture.<sup>13</sup>

Regarding the effects of leadership programmes, researchers study<sup>14</sup> found that co-workers who participate in the training are more self-aware, have improved communication and conflict resolution skills, and foster development in others. They are also more resilient, open to feedback, and better at personal reflections. The focus of leadership development, according to the authors, needs to be on relationships and connections, resulting in a more collaborative and distributed leadership approach.

Leadership training also has a positive effect on the improvement of organizational learning. Hasson, Hansson, Schwarz, Holmstrom, Karanika-Murray, and Tafvelin<sup>15</sup> quantitatively measured the perceptions of subordinates and line managers. Comparisons between pre- and post-intervention assessments revealed that the managers' ratings of continuous learning and employees' ratings of empowerment and embedded systems improved significantly as a result of the training. The leadership training interventions had positive effects on managers' perceptions of individual-level aspects and on employees' perceptions of organizational-level aspects of organizational learning.

These studies analysed large data samples, collected both quantitative and qualitatively. Interviews and surveys before and after interventions appeared to be common methods for collecting data about the impact of leadership development and training. Transformational leadership and contingency theories seemed to be more popular in studies involving leadership training. Furthermore, studies mostly emphasized empirical data. These studies were more commonly found in fields such as healthcare, nursing, and medicine, showing a lack of diversity of contexts in which to understand the effects of training on leaders from different industries and work areas. In addition to the organizational context, previous studies differ from the present one because they do not highlight leaders' communication skills as leaders' central behavior to be improved by training. The studies presented concentrate on leadership behaviors without mentioning communication as essential to the enactment of leadership itself, thus not seeing communication behavior as leadership behavior, and not acknowledging communication's centrality<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> (Campbell, McBride, Etcher & Deming, 2017)

<sup>9</sup> (Clarke & Malcolm, 2016)

<sup>10</sup> (2017)

<sup>11</sup> (Northouse, 2016)

<sup>12</sup> (Le Comte & McClelland, 2017)

<sup>13</sup> (Tourish, 2012)

<sup>14</sup> (2017)

<sup>15</sup> (2016)

<sup>16</sup> (Johansson, Miller & Hamrin, 2014)

### *The pursuing of effective leadership communication*

Despite the research on leadership communication training not being vast, leadership research has always pursued ways for leaders to become effective. Leadership development through time has emphasized leaders' traits, skills, and behaviors as the reasons for effectiveness<sup>17</sup>. The understanding that other variables also influence leadership effectiveness<sup>18</sup> comes much later in leadership development. Leadership skills were perceived with less complexity, because leadership was not considered being dynamic and distributed, and a result of relationships among leadership actors. The leading position has always been associated with the notion of power over others, motivation, effectiveness, performance, and production<sup>19</sup>.

Already in the 70s, leadership researchers started to understand the complexity of leadership and what it demanded to be an effective leader. The simplified view of leadership changed with Leader-Member Exchange Theory (LMX), in which researchers found that the quality of the interactions with co-workers played a role. Leaders have to develop as many high-quality exchanges and working as many relationships as possible with all of their employees (within teams and groups), as well as throughout the organization. The high-quality exchanges increase job satisfaction and performance, avoid the implications of out-groups, and also positively affect the leader's career<sup>20</sup>.

The 1990s brought the linguistic turn, and the assumption that reality is changed in our daily conversations<sup>21</sup>, yielding the notion that leadership is dynamic, flexible, and distributed; leadership is constructed in discourses<sup>22</sup>. To reach effectiveness, leaders have to be aware that leadership is the interplay of influences constituted and apparent through language and discourse and that organisation are constituted of communication<sup>23</sup>. Leaders who are aware of their communicative behaviors either consciously or unconsciously frame their communication<sup>24</sup>. Thus, effective communication is interconnected to leaders' and co-workers' awareness of and use of their discursive resources<sup>25</sup> to achieve goals that improve organisational performance.

## **The Corporation and the leadership and communication program**

Volvo Group is a Swedish multinational corporation in the business of buses and trucks and spare parts with 100 000 employees in 18 countries. In Brazil, there are 3 800 employees and the business area participating in the training part of this study had around 1800 employees. Among the subsidiaries in this business area, the Brazilian plant was the second to finish the leadership and communication training among its leaders.

### *Description of the leadership and communication program*

Volvo Group has a long tradition of investing in leaders' development. The practice of communicative leadership<sup>26</sup> was developed inside Volvo Group in the 1990s. It became a philosophy, integrated into the organizational culture, the "Volvo Way" that led to the

<sup>17</sup> (de Vries, Bakker-Pieper & Oostenveld, 2010; Hackman & Johnson, 2013; House & Aditya, 1997; Northouse, 2016)

<sup>18</sup> (Parry & Bryman, 2006)

<sup>19</sup> (for general reviews, see Hackman & Johnson, 2013; Northouse, 2016; Parry & Bryman, 2006)

<sup>20</sup> (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995)

<sup>21</sup> (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000; Smircich & Morgan, 1982)

<sup>22</sup> (Fairhurst, 2007)

<sup>23</sup> (Clifton, 2012; Fairhurst, 2001; Putnam & Cooren, 2004; Putnam & Fairhurst, 2001)

<sup>24</sup> (Fairhurst, 2010; Johansson, Miller & Hamrin, 2014)

<sup>25</sup> (Hamrin, Johansson & Jahn, 2016)

<sup>26</sup> (see Johansson et al., 2014)

measurement of leaders' communication competence in a Communicative Leadership Index, and the corporation has been a role model for private and public organizations in treating communicative leadership as a concept related to leaders' communication excellence<sup>27</sup>. The training named Communication For Results was developed in 2014 as a follow-up to these investments in leadership and communication in collaboration with an external leadership communication consultant that had worked closely with the organization for many years. The initial strategy was to keep the program central, training leaders in several sites around the Globe. But later, the strategy was to decentralize the training through communication managers from the subsidiary (facilitators), who worked in local sites. They were brought to the headquarters in Sweden and prepared to take the responsibility to enhance the values of the training locally through training leaders. The training of the facilitators was done in English, and the format of this training involved physical and virtual meetings. The Brazilian plant had two representatives in the training.

The implementation of the leadership and communication program Communication For Results was initiated at the subsidiary in 2017 and all leaders attended the training in small groups. The two communications/facilitators responsible got the support of the top management locally in Curitiba, Brazil and one year after this mission was given to them, all leaders had attended the training and they had already advanced to stage two. This time, it was not global. The Brazilian communication managers created a local follow-up in the training a year later to keep the knowledge acquired alive.

This second phase was an intervention based on local premises. It was grounded in reflection time and optimization of the knowledge from the first phase. Leaders needed to revisit the training material to prepare their presentations for the Diálogo, answer what made them evaluate their communication and how they had used the knowledge they got from the first phase of the training.

<sup>27</sup> (Johansson et al, 2011,2014)

*The training*

The training named Communication for Results was planned with physical and virtual meetings and aimed for leaders to communicate effectively to achieve organizational results. It was divided into four phases or modules. These phases link communication to performance, prepare and follow up of the communication, build trust and encourage dialogue, and connect with heads, hearts, and hands (Table 1).

**Table 1. The four modules of the training<sup>28</sup>**

<p><b>Link Communication to performance</b> The difference between sending out information and communicating for results.</p>	<p><b>Prepare and follow up</b> A practical framework to prepare before you communicate and check the results afterwards.</p>
<p><b>Build trust and encourage dialogue</b> How to go beyond presenting facts and details to communicate in a way that engages and builds trust.</p>	<p><b>Connect with heads, hearts, and hands</b> Dialogue and trust – using conversations to build understanding as people work through change; and the daily habits that can build long-term trust</p>

According to instructions in the material, the training which was grounded in research about adult learning, considered that 70% of our learning at work is done through experience and internship at work, 20% takes place through conversations and networks with colleagues and only 10% formally receiving instructional training.

**Table 2. Planned training versus Implemented training**

<b>Planned by the headquarters</b>	<b>Implemented by the Brazilian subsidiary</b>
<p>Global Seven to nine months with three modules: Two virtual-based sessions (1 x 2,5 hours; 1 x 2 hours) One-day physical workshop Homework and work on own real case The training consisted of lectures, workshops, and discussions.</p>	<p>Multi-domestic Communication managers from subsidiaries trained to implement training and act as instructions of the local leaders 1 day physical meeting with lectures, workshops, and discussions Second stage training – Diálogo, groups of 10 leaders were invited. Follow-up and leaders' presentations.</p>

<sup>28</sup> Source: training material from Volvo Group

### *The second phase – Dialogo*

One year later, Brazilian communication managers invited leaders to meet again and share their experiences using the knowledge acquired during the training. The second phase of the training was called Diálogo (Dialogue). Ten leaders were called at a time and two of them were invited to give a presentation about how they practice leadership after the training and how they used the tools they got a year earlier.

The researcher attended the session number 6 of the Diálogo. Leaders and trainers had the chance to talk about the tools that made the most impression and those most used. The central themes of the Diálogo were leaders' communication improvement and how their communication post-training affected employees' response to their communication. In session number 6 of Diálogo indicated that leaders handle similar communication issues daily. Participants related and participated in sharing their own experiences during the two presentations. Leaders mentioned similar experiences and the use of the content of the training.

*Figure 1. Leaders meeting for the Diálogo*



The Dialogo sessions happen during one afternoon and started with the facilitators recollecting the content from the first phase of the training. A booklet with the highlights of the training was distributed as well. After the introduction, they left the floor so two invited leaders could make their presentation of their communication experiences in their workplaces. These leaders said that they used the moment of preparation for the Diálogo for reflections of what they had learned and what they could put in practice, and how they did that. Another reflection was how employees reacted to their communication after the training. The idea with the dialogue was to know what was useful for leaders. The Diálogo

was a strategy to reinforce the content of the training and a way to get feedback on how leaders were using the knowledge they got. The communication manager said that they wanted to hear the success stories that give results to the team.

## Method

This study was conducted in a Brazilian site of a Swedish multinational corporation in the vehicle industry, Volvo Group. The data used in this study consisted of semi-structured individual interviews<sup>29</sup> and observations as follows:

### August 2018

- Individual interviews conducted with 12 leaders who participated in the leadership program;
- Observations of three leaders;

### November 2019

- Individual interviews conducted with the three initially observed leaders;

### January/ February 2020

- Individual interviews conducted with nine co-workers, subordinates of the three leaders.

The first data collection occurred at the Brazilian site approximately one year after the leaders participated in a leadership and communication training programme. Nine interviewed leaders were identified as males and three as females. All of them identified as native Brazilian. The interviews were conducted in their mother tongue, Portuguese, and explored themes referred to leaders' backgrounds and previous experience with communication training, as well as expectations of the training, leaders' perceptions of communication challenges before the training, and knowledge and tools they had acquired during the training, as well as how they use these tools. Also, the interview approached how these leaders communicate, give feedback, and engage co-workers during their daily interactions. In addition, two informant interviews were conducted with the training facilitators, one from the site in Brazil and another from the headquarters in Sweden. The analysis of the first interviews used the themes of the interviews as guidance to organise leaders' perceptions. The second round of interviews (the follow-up with leaders and the additional interviews with co-workers) were inductively analyzed, building the themes from the words and sentences of participants.

<sup>29</sup> (Kvale and Brinkman, 2009)



## Perceptions of the leadership and communication program

Only a few leaders that were respondents in this study had previous experience of training in which communication was the central subject (L3, L4, L11). Two leaders mentioned that they had participated in other leadership training programmes, in which some modules about communication were included (L10).

All leaders concur that the contribution of the training was to help them to understand how the stage of preparation of the communication is important to achieve results. The training taught them to place the audience at the centre of this communication. The leaders mentioned that they did not expect the training to be a defining moment for their communication as it was, but they hoped to find some solutions to their daily communication challenges. They mentioned that adapting information and communication to audiences with different levels of understanding and knowledge according to their positions was the main communication challenge before the training.

Figure 2. Leaders discussing a group work



L1 mentioned that one of the tools from the training, the Communication Staircase, helped him to recognize that co-workers are at different levels of the process of communication. *“I confess that I was not prepared for some types of communication I did [that he did before the training].* (L1) he said that the training helped him to find a tone that he could use to communicate with the different groups at the same time. L1 highlighted that:

[...] To me the importance of leadership became clear, using communication as a tool and getting prepared. And facing it as a real competence, where it requires planning, requires preparation, is not simply getting in front of 300 people and starting to talk... (L1)

All leaders manifested similar concerns with the adaptation of communication to different stakeholders. Furthermore, leaders showed concern in passing on the information to co-workers as fast as they received it instead of waiting to hold official meetings (L6). They also wanted to have their communication as transparent and clear as possible (L7) and that their communication could engage co-workers (L6, L10).

Some of these leaders said that the training was a reinforcement of how they communicated previously; it was a confirmation that they already had the right communication skills (L4, L9). Moreover, they were surprised by the content because it was simple, and it explained theoretically that there are effective ways to communicate.

### Leaders' perceptions of the effects of the training

According to leaders, the knowledge they acquired in the training had effects on their own communication behaviors. L1, for instance, took charge of the preparation of his presentations to the team. Before, L1 delegated the preparation of his communication to an assistant. After the training, he decided to prepare his communicative materials himself. He mentioned that he decided to work with his presentation in the quiet of his home since he uses this time to prepare himself immersing in the subject that will be communicated: *"...it is a way I found to prepare myself because I want to choose that picture that represents the message that I want to communicate"* (L1). He said that the preparation makes him feel more assertive and feeling safe. Leaders said that they have to believe in what they are saying (L3, L8, L9) to communicate well and the strategic preparation of the communication gives them time for that.

Leaders mentioned that they started to use more visual elements in their preparations to achieve the desired impact on the audiences. They started to believe that to be successful with their communication, they had to be strategic; and being intuitive and improvisational when communicating with co-workers is only successful sometimes (L5). But to achieve outcomes for the whole team and organization, it is necessary to prepare the communication with a planned outcome. L10 said that leaders were bad communicators before the training because they did not take into account what good communication consists of:

[...] Proper communication to the public has several aspects and many of them were not taken into consideration. Today we consider that we are making the process of communication more effective. Much of what was done in the past was very intuitive... (L10)

The findings indicate that the training program contributed tools to help leaders reflect and analyse their and co-workers' communication behaviors. L7 said that the difference after the training is that he understands what specifically needs to be communicated to employees to achieve results:

... Specifically for me, I have to understand the communication before I pass it forward and I also have to know what I want back through communication. If it's just information or something I need a response to. This is what has changed [after the training]. Before I did not have that perception. (L7).

According to L7, during the period of preparation, he can discern what message requires a response, and what simply needs to be transmitted. Some leaders see the achievement of results as the recognition of leaders' good communication skills. L8 said that to make your preparation valuable, you also have to achieve the desired results in the end:

*“Communicating very well, talking very well, engaging people, telling people why it is extremely important for the outcome, but you have to make sure that you have achieved the outcome, if not, it was not worth [the effort]”* (L8). L8 stressed that the importance of the training was that it made clear that it is not sufficient to simply make people understand what you want to say; leaders have to make them give responses and take actions. This is the only way that communication benefits the organization, and leaders have to be assertive to engage others.

The main effects on leaders’ behaviors, according to their accounts:

- Leaders started to take charge of the preparation of their communication;
- Leaders felt safe and assertive communicating;
- Leaders started to reflect on and systematically analyse communication behaviors;
- Leaders became more aware of the importance of planning communication and started to use the tools they acquire during the training to optimize the clarity of their messages.

#### *Preparing effective communication – balancing passion, logic, and ethics*

Leaders’ accounts indicated that the training contributed to leaders’ increasing their communication awareness and changing their communication behaviors, and improvement of certain communication skills such as preparing and adapting their communication to achieve the desired results.

All respondents mentioned three main tools provided in the training: 1) the use of rhetorical elements of logos, pathos, and ethos preparing messages – the training emphasised the knowledge that emotional commitment is more powerful than rational commitment to achieve performance; 2) the communications staircase emphasising the different phases of the commitment of the audiences; and 3) the analysis of the stakeholders to prepare the communication to target groups – the training emphasised mainly the first point preparing a message/communication – “know your WHY” something has to be communicated. The WHY is important because employees get to engage in an activity, they have to know clearly what results are expected the activities – the result is WHY we have to do the activity. These three tools are the practical legacy of the training according to these leaders. These tools were mentioned and illustrated during the interviews, especially the rhetorical elements, logos, pathos, and ethos, as well as the slogan of the training – connecting hearts, heads, and hands. L1 commented on how he started to change the way he works with communication:

... And I think a nice aspect I got of the [training] was that ... I started using more pictures, figures, less text, more visual...So I guess when I saw this ... logos, ethos, pathos, head, and heart joining, logic (the slogan is that connecting hearts, heads, and hands) of the training ... now I try to connect these things. Adapting them for audiences too (L1).

L9 mentioned that what made an impression on him was the understanding of taking into account people’s logic and emotions to make a message effective in encouraging performance. The leader said that only during the training did he understand the complexity of communication:

The fact that there is a sequence, there is logic, passion... that is connected with people’s feelings. There is this relationship and we need to be taken care of it. Take care of how the message impacts on people. No matter how

technical or whatever the message is – from the organization and I'm just the messenger passing it – I have to believe in it, I have to get the message across, I have to make sure people understood it, and I can see if the message is having result from observations in what I am perceiving in people. So it is not a cold message ... it has to make sense, that people have feelings and that I need to take care of it (L9).

Leaders said that after the training, they started to use these elements to balance their messages according to the needs of employees. L7 said that he uses the techniques he learned in the training even outside of work, with his family. He became more aware of the interlocutors' reactions when he communicates. His observations make it possible for him to adjust his communication according to the emotional needs of the person, and to communicate a suitable message at the right moment:

To be honest, I use this with my wife today, I use it with my daughter today, not looking at the logos, pathos ... but I know exactly the time I'm going to report something by her reaction and where I need to reach and use. It's very funny, it depends on the emotional state of the person, it depends on the way she is at that moment ... Observation, that's the word, the observation of the communication and how far it is reaching, and incredible as it may seem in practice, my coordinator was better at it than this, because when it comes to presenting something he is noticing how the environment is, and I never realized it, I realized what I was reporting. If I was reaching the level I wanted to communicate, but I was not realizing the reception of that. He was much better than me (L7).

Leaders, like L7, talked about preparation, reception, and response to communication. The use of rhetorical elements also made leaders use more visual resources in their language, like metaphors, and storytelling to be clearer with their messages and achieve the desired results. They obtained this knowledge and these tools during the training programme. L2 also mentioned "the knowledge about pathos, logos, and ethos" made him start to observe more fully how he had to communicate with others, and he consciously began applying more passion, logic, and ethics in the planned communication.

These new resources helped leaders to find new perspectives and angles to help employees to make sense of situations within the group, with the overall aim of achieving a result. L3 said that sometimes leaders know that something is beneficial to the employees, but have to choose a frame with a balanced message to make them engaged and understand that their action will be beneficial to themselves and the entire group. The leader gave an example to explain this.

Her group needed an expert in the team, but the group was already full, with no possibilities of hiring an external employee – while there was another group that needed a new employee with expertise from her team. The leader then explained the situation to one of her employees and communicated the opportunity to move to another sector: "I thought of you because you are a person who has expertise in what we do here ... you've gone through a lot of situations with clients" (L3) By making this move she could help the other group understand the impact they cause when they do not deliver.

Furthermore, L3 believed that the training had impact on her communication and her way of framing a message as something positive for the individual with gains for the team. In her explanation of the situation to the employee, she used logic and appeals to emotion, showing that his actions could be of value to the overall group performance.

L3's communication strategy is in line with that of L5, who emphasized that effective communication is relevant to keeping the group united and in harmony to achieve the planned results and to keep work flowing. It is also crucial to maintaining balance and harmony in the group, thereby avoiding disturbances.

#### *Observations of three leaders*

The observations indicated that despite the training, leaders' communication behaviors were conditioned to the leaders' position concerning the interacting partners in the meetings observed. All three leaders were observed to have a relational leadership style, but the groups they led and the situation in which they were leading played a role and affected their communication behaviors as well. The observations took place in August 2018, approximately a year after the training.

**First-line manager:** The leader worked very close to co-workers (physical space). The leaders seemed to be very approachable and available. The co-workers demanded little or no micro-management. The leaders used a more delegating communication approach with the group. During the meeting, the leader moderated their conversation and instigated her co-workers to search for more knowledge. The leader had the opportunity to have a coaching role during meetings, urging co-workers to find answers and more information themselves.

**Middle manager:** the reporters of this leader are team leaders with direct contact with the co-workers on the floor. They demanded more directive communication behavior from the leader. The leader tried on several occasions to be relational and inclusive with all members of the groups on the meetings he was responsible for, but some of the members in his group asked back for instructions, directions and how to proceed to solve a certain issue. The leader's behavior was thus forced into a more instructional role with few changes in connecting with the tools from the training.

**Top leader:** The reporters (subordinates) of this leader were also leaders coordinating their groups and knowledgeable about their work areas. They inform the observed leader about their groups. The observed top leader also seemed approachable and available. The leader used a more participative and interactive communication style with reporters. During the meeting with them, the leader only slightly moderated and facilitated the conversation, and got informed by them. During the updates in the meeting, the leader could fill up some gaps of information between one and another reporter, making sure that all participants around the table could get the full view about what each person was talking about.

#### *Effects that are still perceived approximately two years after the training*

The three observed leaders were interviewed again in November 2019. They were still using similar language when talking about communication and mentioned the tools they acquired during the training. However, during the last year since they were observed and interviews the first time, these leaders said they felt the need to keep developing their leadership with other training that added value to their leadership and communication training they had.

The leaders emphasized that the training instigated them to evaluate their communication. For example, the leader in the quote below believed that part of her

communication strategy of self-evaluation is from her profile, but the training gave her a methodology that helps a leader become more effective:

when you have a training that shows you a methodology that makes sense to you, you can self-assess [your communication]... of course, feedbacks, everything from the outside has the same importance as before... but you also become more effective in the sense that you can also evaluate yourself; sometimes after communicating [I think:] I talked to that person; "Hey I could have used Pathos more in this situation" (L3)

Leaders appeared to have worked further with their development. They attended other trainings to develop their communication skills further. L3 said that some of these trainings repeat themselves, but the leader considers it as something positive: "... What good is this? When you learn and assimilate, you think and practice, what before seemed like a theory becomes instinctive. This is important otherwise you lose your authenticity when you talk to someone".

According to the leader, the more you practice, the more you accept the content of the training as your own and internalize it. The leader attended additional training about difficult conversations. L2 also improved his competence with training to manage your time, organize and work more effectively via emails; this included communicating with more efficiency with these emails as well. L2 also attended a training that helped to know more about the resources available to improve the visualization of indicators, facilitating the communication of the company's indicators. L1 attended an additional training on coaching and a training working with a 360-degrees approach on leadership, considering the whole aspects of leadership and the person in a leadership position.

Leaders mentioned the same tools they mentioned in the first interviews one year earlier: the communication staircase, how to analyse the audience, and rhetorical tools (with emphasis on the emotions – pathos). As L1 summarized in the quote below:

... I try to recurrently use the emotional resource, connect the head and heart there, I think it also has to do with Logos, Ethos, and Pathos. But it is like this, it is a resource that I am careful to connect to what I am going to communicate, whether for a larger audience or a smaller audience, my managerial meeting, I try to make use of these devices, sharing a personal experience or making people to share an experience linked, obviously, to that topic. (L1)

Figure 3. Leaders sharing their experiences of communication during the *Diálogo*



### *Effects perceived by co-workers*

The nine co-workers interviewed in this study were subordinate to the three leaders who participated in the observations and a second interview. Their accounts are thus related only to these leaders. The co-workers in general considered their leaders as being outstanding communicators and role models. CW1 said that the leader is very special and inspired him with his trajectory. The co-worker also showed appreciation for the leader being generous with his knowledge in formal and informal conversations. "I don't know what [the leader] should improve more. I use [the leader] as my reference."

The co-workers said that their leaders have always had good communication skills, but even though they cannot say when this happened, leaders have progressively improved these skills. Co-workers used meeting presentations as examples to explain that they can see a change in leaders' skills. Leaders are open and have a continuous dialogue about co-workers' development (CW4, 5, 6, 7, 8). CW6 highlighted another aspect in leaders' meetings, the communication routine that creates engagement by involving the team:

He always asks our opinion, first he gives a context, he explains what's happening, explains why, after [that] you understand why he talks about what direction the organization is going, what it would like to do [in the future], and then he asks us: "What can we do to move from [this] point to that point [where the organization wants to be]?" And that connection, we build together. I see that we don't leave the meeting as if it was a goal that he passed on to us, it is a goal that we built the path for together."

Leaders give feedback both formally and informally. Co-workers mentioned that the possibility of receiving feedback has increased since the corporation adopted continuous appraisals (CW7, 8,9).

I was a technician, I remember the feedback he gave me when I didn't know if I needed to do an activity, and I ended up doing it. And, at the time, he gave me the feedback that I did it right, that you should not only think about your role but on the whole because we are a team. So he was very clear and made an impression ... and helped me a lot in what I do, in what I need to do." (CW2)

Co-workers perceived that leaders showed interest in their development as professionals, encouraging them to get formal education and training. The co-workers also mentioned leaders' interest in helping them with private issues that could affect their private and work lives (CW5, 6, 7, 8). These leaders' behaviors appeared to increase the confidence co-workers have for them and their communication. Some of these co-workers also have responsibilities with staff subordinate to them and they use their leaders as a role model in their leadership style (CW4, 5,6).



## Conclusion

This study highlighted leaders' and co-workers perceptions of the effects of a training programme that focused on developing effective communication in leaders, as well as increasing communication awareness, and fostering better communication skills, with the overall aim of increased performance of individuals and the organization. The literature on leadership training does not emphasise communication skills as essential for leaders to achieve results. The literature on leadership, however, has always pursued leadership effectiveness. However, the role of communication for leadership effectiveness became more accentuated after the linguistic turn<sup>30</sup>. In the present study, leaders' standpoints indicate that they have a great need to learn in practice how to make their communication more effective to achieve results, and they need concrete examples and feasible ways to practice leadership through communication.

Interviewed leaders that participated in the training considered that the leadership and communication program contributed to their awareness of what role communication plays for the achievement of results. The programme also contributed to leaders acquired a communication language that helped them to achieve results with their teams. After the training, leaders started to use the shared vocabulary and tools to make their communication more effective. Two years after the training, this shared language is still salient and the leaders still use the tools.

The strategic use of communication caused leaders to reflect on how to adapt their communication in consideration to employees' communication needs. They started to express concerns about the preparation and clarity of the message and how their audiences understood what they communicated. The rhetorical elements of pathos, logos, and ethos were mentioned several times during the interviews, and they were referred to as a tool to reach and engage employees with their messages. Leaders said that they learned how to balance logic, passion, and ethics in their messages, achieving more efficiency in communication. Another direct effect of the training is that leaders started to use visual resources, metaphors, and storytelling to be clearer with their messages.

Participants' accounts indicated that certain aspects of the training remained as communication skills even two years after training, such as the steps to prepare their communication and messages; the perception that co-workers' communication awareness proceed in steps (communications staircase) that demands different activities; how to use metaphors, storytelling, and audio-visual resources to enhance messages; and the rhetorical resources, namely pathos, logos, and ethos. These are practical elements that helped leaders with how to enhance messages to achieve results with individuals and the group, creating engagement and, consequently, alignment and action. Leaders, however, stressed most emphatically the preparation in advance of communicating; and their knowledge about the importance of the follow up with individuals and groups that come after communicating. This result might be explained by the routines of feedbacks of the corporation, which works with a personal business plan and emphasizes that every leader focuses on that with their co-workers. Another explanatory factor is that although the programme was curtailed, the training in Brazil was contextualized in the local leaders' reality, but maintained the global essence of the organisational culture of the corporation.

The theoretical implication of these findings is the evidence that we have to study several contexts and programmes of leadership and communication, in an in-depth

<sup>30</sup> (Clifton, 2012; Fairhurst, 2001; Putnam & Cooren, 2004; Putnam & Fairhurst, 2001)

manner, to understand the commonalities they have across various contexts and to ascertain which kind of programme is most effective in terms of organizational performance. In this study, we have provided only one example and limited the collection to only 12 interviews. The addition of quantitative methods, such as surveys administered to all leaders and co-workers, might provide valuable information to direct us to models for training in the leadership and communication development field.

Another point of interest is that effective communication should not be mistaken for persuasion or manipulation, nor should it be confused with the use of communication resources and techniques to influence co-workers without requiring feedback<sup>31</sup>. There is a need for more studies scrutinizing the content of programmes dedicated to assisting leaders in improving their linguistic resources. Rhetorical resources, such as those taught and shown in the present studies, can be used in advertising and in other types of narratives to persuade audiences. Further studies can also explore the impact on leaders of the perceived effects of the headquarters' multi-domestic strategy of implementing the programme, which focused more on local re-contextualization and responsiveness than on global integration of the training<sup>32</sup>.

The practical implication of this study is that, as shown in the sample, leaders appeared to need assistance with skills that enhance their ability to communicate. Communications professionals working internally, as well as those who coach leaders, can make use of the findings in this paper, as it shows that leaders working in corporations that traditionally invest in leadership programmes are still perceiving a contribution of the communication department, as it renders assistance and knowledge about using communication practices and language (in different forms).

In sum, the knowledge and awareness about effective communication that the program provided to these leaders allowed them to understand the communicative interplay with their employees, to achieve better organizational performance (Johansson, Miller & Hamrin, 2014). The literature in the area is scarce, but the literature of leadership development indicates that interventions of leadership communication training might have positive effects on leaders' performance, benefiting the teams and organizations as a whole. More empirical studies – using different industries, areas, and organizational conditions – are necessary to find commonalities, variations, and the possibilities of building a model.

<sup>31</sup> (Tourish, 2012)

<sup>32</sup> (Caligiuri, Lazarova & Tarique, 2005)

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